Environmental Front

Compiled by Deborah Elliott

Jim Zelenak

The endangered golden-cheeked warbler has prospered under Fort Hood's protection, with the bird's survival rate increasing some 900 percent.

What Would Fort Hood Do?

AT Fort Hood, Texas, even routine environmental matters seem to grow to gargantuan size without much effort, considering the size of the post — about 337 square miles, the same land area as the city of Dallas — and the number of assigned soldiers waiting to train on that land — about 42,000 of them, almost a tenth of the active Army.

To reach that delicate balance between training needs and environmental concerns, Fort Hood environmentalists are constantly looking at such things as water quality, the prevention of hazardous materials incidents, the management of two endangered species on the post, the protection of more than 1,100 cultural sites and much, much more.

The good news is that Fort Hood's balancing act between training needs and environmental concerns has been successful. In fact, Fort Hood is an example that others often look to, and the question, "What would Fort Hood do?" is not uncommon when planners discuss environmental matters.

The most striking example of Fort Hood's search for environmental solutions involves the protection of one of its two endangered species, the golden-cheeked warbler.

The golden-cheeked warbler, like the other endangered species on post, the black-capped vireo, is a small songbird that nests in the Fort Hood region . The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers the habitat for both birds at Fort Hood to be the only significant protected blocks of habitat in the central recovery region. That means the Army and Fort Hood currently bear the burden for the bird's recovery in the region.

In the early 1990s the warbler populations were declining and the birds were having a hard time surviving, largely due to parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds, which lay their eggs in the nests of other birds.

After coordinating with the Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Hood entered into a partnership with The Nature Conservancy, a well-known civilian conservation group, to implement a recovery strategy. A major trapping program was begun on the post to remove the cowbirds from the warblers' nesting areas. Concurrently, an extensive effort was made to limit military training activities in the warblers' nesting areas during certain times of the year. As a result of the ongoing actions, the warblers now have an amazing recovery and their populations are now the highest on record.

Fort Hood has used that same innovative approach to fine-tune other environmental programs and find solutions that provide positive results while still allowing the post to accomplish its training mission.

"Fort Hood approaches every mission with the same intensity, and that runs the gamut from combat training and real-world deployments, to the protection of our natural and cultural resources," said COL David Hall, the former garrison commander.

"Every time I see one of our 'troops' in the Environmental Division, I ask them what new and innovative programs they're trying, to ensure that we meet all of our requirements," Hall said. "That said, I believe we have the best programs and the best environmentalists in the Army. Not only do I believe this, I rather offer it to the Army as a solution to any problem … anyone, anywhere who wants to get better at environmental protection should just ask themselves, 'What would Fort Hood do?'" — *Cecil B. Green, Fort Hood Public Affairs Office*

Echoes of Fort Carson's Past

IF you listen carefully, you can almost hear echoes of the past blowing in the wind across the training lands at Fort Carson:

Randy Korgel

Fort Carson workers spread protective heavy-gauge plastic and soil over the Woodland Culture site.

the tinkling sounds of children at play by a creek bed and the voices of women hard at work grinding seeds between stones to make bread.

Fort Carson is spread across an area of Colorado that is rich in the cultural history of the Plains Indians who lived and worked on these lands. Randy Korgel, Fort Carson's archeologist, has uncovered Indian artifacts that date to the Woodland Culture from 800 to 1100 AD. Clues found at one ancient campsite provide important information about the group's society and lifestyle that would otherwise be lost.

But the site lies in a major training corridor. It is one of 20 sites fenced off by the post's Directorate of Environmental Compliance and Management to protect them from damage.

The artifacts discovered by Korgel lie in a shallow soil bed that cannot adequately protect them.

To guard the site yet still allow for critical training in the surrounding area, Korgel recommended that post engineers cap the two-acre area with a heavy-gauge plastic liner and spread five feet of native soil over it. Then the soil would be seeded to grow vegetation that would maintain the cap's integrity. Once the area had enough growth, the land could be returned to training purposes.

To test his theory that the cap would adequately protect the artifacts, Korgel constructed a pilot cap over a site of buried glass bottles, ceramics and tin cans. When this site is ready, it will be exposed to tank traffic. The results from the pilot site will be used to determine how well the cap on the Woodland Culture site will perform under training conditions.

Using such caps may also save money. Fort Carson used its own labor and resources to construct the cap, and a significant cost savings was immediately realized. Future savings are also anticipated.

"What we're spending on the cap construction is equal to what it would cost to build the initial fence, though a fence requires additional money for maintenance each year," said Korgel. "The cap will quickly pay for itself."

The soil used to create the cap was taken from mature erosion-control dams on post. Over time these dams had built up sediment and been rendered useless, but by removing the soil to the cap site, the dams were made fully functional again.

The cap solution has never been tried on Department of Defense lands. If successful, this remedy could have a wide-ranging, positive impact at other installations. — *Susan C. Galentine-Ketchum, Directorate of Environmental Compliance and Management*

Environmental Sharp Shooters Contest

THE Environmental Sharp Shooters photography contest recognizes and rewards military and civilian photographers for their achievements in furthering the objectives of the Army's environmental program through still photography. **Soldiers** reminds its readers to submit their best environmental photographs for a special "Environmental Sharp Shooters" feature in the April 2002 issue.

Deadline for submission is Dec. 31. For complete information visit the U.S. Army Environmental Center website at **http://aec.army.mil**. You may also contact Cynthia Houston at **Environmental.Front@aec.apgea.army.mil**, or by phone at (410) 436-1270.

Please send your contributions or questions to Cynthia Houston, National Outreach Team Leader, U.S. Army Environmental Center, 5179 Hoadley Road, Attn.: SFIM-AEC-PA, Bldg. 4415, Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD 21010-5401, or e-mail **Environmental.Front @aec.apgea.army.mil**. Houston can be reached by phone at (410) 436-1270 or (DSN) 584-1270.